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CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT  
AND COMPTROLLER

**VOICE**

**You Have A  
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**FRAUD ALERT**

**SIGN UP TODAY** and receive free alerts when a document with your name is recorded in Official Records. Protect yourself from fraud. **CLICK HERE.**

**GET IN TOUCH:**

**Write:**

Public Integrity Unit  
Division of Inspector General  
Fraud Hotline  
510 Bay Avenue  
Clearwater, FL 33756

**Call:**

(727) 45FRAUD  
(727) 453-7283

**Fax:**

(727) 464-8386

**E-mail:**

fraudhotline@mypinellasclerk.org

**Internet:**

[www.mypinellasclerk.org](http://www.mypinellasclerk.org)  
[www.twitter.com/pinellasig](https://twitter.com/pinellasig)  
[www.facebook.com/igpinellas](https://www.facebook.com/igpinellas)

## Protect Yourself from the Five Most Common Google Play Gift Card Scams

Since the beginning of the year, the National Consumers League (NCL) Fraud.org campaign has received hundreds of complaints from consumers reporting that scammers involved in a variety of frauds requested payment via gift cards. Dozens of those complaints mentioned that they specifically wanted payment via Google Play gift cards. Unfortunately, many of the complaints they received indicated that the consumer had already sent the money. Average losses reported in such cases were \$1,937.

Gift cards are popular targets for scammers. According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), \$74.3 million was lost due to gift card and reload card scams in the first nine months of this year. With the holiday season upon us, it is likely that scammers will ramp up their activity even more.

To help you protect yourself from scams involving gift cards, Google and NCL are collaborating to help educate consumers about how to spot the warning signs of these scams. The most important thing to know is that Google Play gift cards can only be used to purchase apps, movies, books, and other video game or app-related purchases through the Google Play store. If anyone ever asks you to pay them with a Google Play gift card, it is a scam.

### FIVE COMMON GOOGLE PLAY GIFT CARD SCAM SCENARIOS

#### IRS and government imposter:

You may get a phone call from someone claiming to be the IRS, police, or another official government entity. If this caller tries to scare you into buying gift cards as payment for back taxes or for other legal situations, hang up the phone even if the caller knows and recites the last four digits of your Social Security number. The caller may become hostile or insulting and they may threaten you with arrest, deportation, or suspension of a business or driver's license. Under no circumstances does the IRS, police, or any government entities require payment with gift cards to resolve tax or other legal situations.

#### Tech support:

You may get a phone call from someone claiming to be tech support or a computer software company asking for Google Play gift cards as payment to fix your computer. Alternatively, you may get an email from a computer software company asking you to call them so they can protect your computer from harmful viruses or fix a program you use. The email may contain a virus that causes computer problems. When you call, they will ask for payment and may say that because your computer has been compromised, your credit cards have also been compromised. Then they will ask for payment by Google Play gift card.

#### Family emergency:

A caller may claim to be a family member in trouble (or an attorney or representative of a family member who is in trouble) and needs to receive money in the form of gift cards to remedy their emergency. The caller may try to deter you from contacting the family member in question to validate the claims.

# *the* IG **FRAUD ALERT**

## **Discounted goods or services:**

Someone may tempt you with a great deal and offer a large discount if you pay with a Google Play gift card instead of paying with a credit/debit card. They may also claim there are issues with a credit/debit card payment you recently made so you must pay with a Google Play gift card instead.

## **Email requests:**

You might get an email from someone you know asking you to perform a “task” or a “favor” to purchase Google Play gift cards and email them the redemption codes. While the sender’s name and email address may look like a family member, friend, or colleague, this is actually a sophisticated phishing scam disguised as a trustworthy request from someone you know. Do not buy gift cards and respond with the redemption codes.

It is important to know that all of the scenarios outlined above are scams. Scammers may dictate which store you should purchase Google Play gift cards from (e.g., Target, Walmart, CVS, etc.). Scammers may discourage you from speaking to or answering questions from store associates, colleagues, friends, or family members.

If you find yourself in any of the situations above, or something similar, you are at risk of being scammed. Do not purchase gift cards and share the redemption codes with the requester over the phone or in writing. If you do, your money is likely gone. If you or a family member has experienced a scam, please report it immediately to your local police department. You can also report the scam to the FTC on their website or directly to Google by phone at the toll-free U.S. phone number (1-855-836-3987) or by email (visit [g.co/Play/Contact](https://g.co/Play/Contact) and click on “Contact Us”).

The bottom line is that any time you are asked to pay someone with a Google Play gift card in exchange for goods or services, it is a scam. In fact, it is a violation of Google Play’s Terms of Service to use Google Play gift cards to pay for anything outside of the Google Play Android app store.

Unfortunately, despite everyone’s best efforts, scammers still find ways to defraud consumers. If this happens to you, contact the company that issued the gift card. The company’s contact info is usually on the card or the card’s packaging. It is rare, but if you act quickly enough the company may be able to refund your money. Also, contact the store where you purchased the card and file a complaint at [Fraud.org](https://Fraud.org) via their secure online complaint form. They share complaints with their network of nearly 200 law enforcement and consumer protection agency partners who can and do put fraudsters behind bars.



For more information or to file a complaint, contact Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 or visit [www.pinellascounty.org/consumer](https://www.pinellascounty.org/consumer).